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Descriptive

Reading

ON

DARJEELING

Illustrated

BY

12 Lantern Slides

WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
1891

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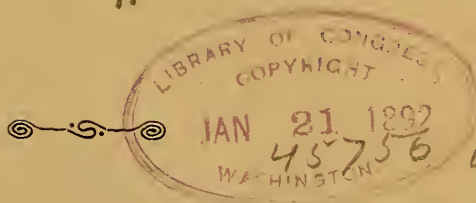
DESCRIPTIVE READING

ON

DARJEELING

ILLUSTRATED BY TWELVE LANTERN
SLIDES

Edmund Stirling



WILLIAM H. RAU
PHILADELPHIA
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DARJEELING.

“To him, who, in the love of Nature, holds communion with her visible forms, she speaks a various language.” And,

“If thou art worn and heart beset
With sorrows, that thou would'st forget,
If thou would'st read a lesson, that will keep
Thy heart from fainting, and thy soul from sleep.
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears.”

Did the poet catch his inspiration, I wonder, from the grand Himalayas! For in no region of the earth are Nature's grandeur and simplicity more harmoniously blended and more strongly exemplified than in Northern India.

1. Darjeeling Railroad, Two-Foot Gauge.—What though traveling on the Narrow Gauge Railway to Darjeeling be at times monotonous, somewhat uncomfortable and largely dangerous! Our journey's end will well repay us for its annoyances. Let us make Calcutta our starting-point, and travel northward by the new railway. After running more than a hundred miles we come to the bank of the Ganges, where a steamboat in waiting conveys us over this broad stream. Upon the other side of the river we find a train with the usual sleeping carriage. Traversing a low, swampy plain for some distance we arrive at Silliguri, and from this

point to Darjeeling we travel on the Narrow Gauge steam tramway, which has been completed within quite recent times.

This railway is a two-feet gauge, climbing 8,000 feet right through the mountain, turning and twisting itself into marvelous complications; now rushing under bridges, now sweeping in a loop and dashing over them.

Each separate carriage holds six persons in comfortable arm-chairs. A formidable brake is provided for each car. The railway is certainly a wonderful construction. In many cases the line runs along the edge of such tremendous gorges and such deep precipices that we are amazed at the triumph of engineering skill which could overcome such apparently insurmountable obstacles. At one point the line rises to a complete figure 8, at another a hill is climbed in a series of zigzags on which the engine is alternately placed at the front and rear of the train.

2. On the R. R. to Darjeeling.—The view from our car windows gives us some idea of the dangers of the route. But, as if to make amends for our discomfort, Nature offers us her choicest bits of scenery. The tall undergrowth through which our road at first lies, gives way to forest trees and the tea plantations. Higher up, the fields are adorned with flowers, yellow and purple, blue and lilac. Great clumps of bamboo lift their feathery tops to a surprising height, and blooming creepers let down their rope-like tendrils from the over-hanging branches of the kingly forest trees. We stop at Teendaria and rest our engine for a brief space. Again we are on our journey. One

moment the eye rests upon distant peaks or gigantic ravines; the next, on rounding a curve, a panorama of exquisite beauty opens like a dream. Below us are the wooded summits, lying terrace-like before us; beyond them, stretches a boundless plain ribboned with a silvery stream.

Here and there along the road we come upon familiar bullock-carts. The natives, leading their pigs, furnish us with diversion, for the struggles between the obstinate animal and the determined man are ludicrous in the extreme.

At Kurseong we take a stronger engine, as the ascent has become much steeper. Tree ferns and towering oaks set in beds of wild flowers here border the pathway. Occasionally we see a gang of Coolies engaged in clearing away the debris resulting from a land-slide. And now, we are actually traveling in cloud-land. Trackless gorges and noisy torrents, spanned by substantial arched bridges, succeed each other at intervals. On our way we notice a number of rags, (several being sometimes attached to one pole,) flying from the shanties which rest on the hill-side. These dirty rags contain prayers inscribed by the Lamas, and are hung out by the ignorant and superstitious villagers to paralyze the evil spirits floating in the air. We are now within the range of the snowy "roof of the world," facing the august Kunchinjunga; and right ahead of us, though half hidden by the veil of clouds which covers it, lies Darjeeling.

3. Darjeeling, from Lloyd's Bank.—The view of Darjeeling from Lloyd's Bank, as we here see it, is that of a romantic, picturesque mountain-scene, where

the houses, perched on the spur of a mountain or the side of a hill, look like fairy homes in an enchanted garden. Nature is so lavish of her beauties, that no architectural deformities can mar the fair aspect that she here wears. Great tea and cinchona plantations stretch as far as the eye can reach. These tea gardens are sometimes laid out in most unromantic fashion, acre upon acre being planted with great rows of bushes two feet high. While in the centre stands the manager's bungalow, surrounded by low houses where the tea is prepared for shipment. But here the plantations are laid out in terrace fashion, one about two feet above the other, which decidedly adds to the beauty of the scene. The houses are few and far between, and the high hills conceal many of them from our view. Yet, there is an air of life and industry which adds to the general scenic effect, and the pale holy features of the sweet Sisters of Charity that descend the pathway, seem in striking harmony with Nature's sublimity.

4. Group of Himalayan Coolies.—Life in the mountains has its attractions to the artistic mind, which there beholds the majesty of God reflected from the mountain-tops. But indeed we may question its attractions for the hill coolies or drudges whose heavy burdens seem still greater from the steep paths which they must travel. And yet, in seeing them at their work, they are apparently never more content than when bending forward, Atlas-like, under a great burden, held upon the back by a grass band passing across the forehead.

The group of coolies before us are resting for a few

moments from their labors, and if we can forget their aching limbs and strained shoulders we may imagine from their positions that they are fairly comfortable. These coolies belong principally to the Bhootea tribe. They are a tall, robust, and sturdy people, with broad mouths and flat noses. Their complexion is whitish yellow, but as they seldom wash, the skin is encrusted with dirt, tar, and smoke. They dress in loose blankets tied around the waist with a leather strap, in which they place their pipes, chop-sticks, tinder-box, tobacco-pouch, and long sharp knives. Their clothing is such as will admit of great freedom of motion.

Although our representation shows us only the male coolies, it is of common occurrence to see female coolies dragging the heaviest burdens. In fact, on one occasion, one of these sturdy women actually carried a grand piano on her back from Kurseong to the station, a work that an English or American railway porter would not think of attempting.

5. Nepalese Coolie Woman With Rain Umbrella.

—The Nepalese are light and agile, with intelligent and pleasing countenances. They are active and enduring and extraordinarily brave. They are employed almost exclusively on the tea plantations, but the women are preferred to the men on account of their lighter and more delicate touch.

This Nepalese coolie woman is a fine specimen of her class. Her upper garment is of a light color and is wound loosely about her body to insure easy movement, while a skirt of a bright calico extends downward to the ankles. Like most of her class, her neck is adorned with rows of beads, some of vegetable

ivory, others of amber. Besides being matters of adornment they are supposed to possess magical virtues, such as freedom from disease and evil spirits. What is most conspicuous about her is a formidable rain umbrella. It is constructed of canes of bamboo closely interwoven, and twisted to afford protection from the elements. It is oblong in shape, and of a very large size. Were it not that bamboo is very light, this rain umbrella would be a most cumbrous affair. As it is very flexible, it can readily be bent into that shape which affords greatest protection. One wonders whether it might not be just as well to dispense with a little protection over head, and extend the kindly care to the feet which, as is usual among these people, are uncovered.

6. Fog Clearing Away from Darjeeling Bazaar—However, if the day is a misty one, many defects will be concealed; but we would rather see the imperfections than miss a sunshiny day on the heights. In the early morning a dense fog hovers over Kunchinjinga and almost obscures Darjeeling, which lies within its shadow; but the mist gradually disperses, and patches of vivid blue show themselves between the breaking clouds. The scene is one of unsurpassed grandeur. The semi-darkness that precedes it, only serves to heighten the effect of the pure sunlight when it actually makes its appearance.

As the fog lifts, the white tops of the houses gradually show themselves; the verdure on the mountain-side puts on its bright green robe, the mountain-peaks, clothed in glittering snow, one after another, expose themselves to our view, and the whole scene is

so rarely transfigured that we feel as though we had found the "peace that passeth understanding."

As the mists pass away, we see before us a crowd of busy, struggling, human beings, each striving in competition with the other, each vending his wares with persistent clamor, each driving a sharp bargain with the unsuspecting tourist. Here in the Bazaar the bulk of the people are assembled. Grain, clothing, sweet-meats, household stores, and a variety of trifling articles too numerous to mention, lie in rows spread on mats upon the ground. The venders, both male and female, sit beside their wares, the man usually in front, while near by sits his wife surrounded oft-times by their growing family.

7. Milk Seller with Bamboo Milk Jars.—Among all the vegetable productions of India, none are so highly esteemed by the natives as the bamboo. And their high respect for this growth is really warranted by its usefulness. Light, flexible, tough and durable, it is put to every conceivable purpose; from the manufacture of so trifling a thing as a pipe to the building of boats and bridges. Our hero of the milk-pails is perfectly aware of the utility of this vegetable growth, for he carries his refreshing beverage about in jars made of bamboo.

Being firmly twisted together, and all interstices carefully clothed by a gummy substance, the jar is absolutely water-proof, besides being lighter than one of tin. These are cylindrical in shape, being bound round in several places with broad hoops of bamboo. Ropes of twisted grass are attached to the sides; and these cans may thus be carried on the arm much as

the American woman carries her over-laden market basket. The lightness of the jar may be readily conceived when we see our milkman carrying six of them with ease.

8. Nepalese Mother with Infant in Basket.—We have here another interesting use of the bamboo, for see, in the basket so cleverly formed of its fibres, we see reposing a small child, who makes violent efforts to escape from its resting place. But this is impossible, for the baby is securely bound down by a broad, flat band, which extends from one side of the basket to another. A few coarse, soiled rags, are placed in the bottom of the basket, on which the child may rest. My sympathies go out to this poor mother, and to all other women of her class. Like most of her race she is tall and well formed. She has disfigured her face by a large nose-ring. Around her neck she wears a heavy string of beads, to which a large amulet is attached. So fond is she of jewelry, that she even wears an anklet. Her regular occupation is the picking, sorting and packing of tea, for her more delicate touch renders her better able to do this work than the men.

She is, no doubt, contented with her lot! But oh, the misery of it as it appears to us. Life amid such surroundings is so narrow, so contracted! It is one dull, weary round of labor, with probably famine at its close. For while the country abounds with grain, and fat, rich bullocks graze at will upon the pasture lands, the poor peasant labors and starves. While he has to maintain the glorious display of an imperial policy, while he has to support legions of scarlet

soldiers, purple politicals, and green commissions, he must remain the hunger-stricken, over-driven phantom that he is. Perhaps the half-despondent, half-frightened countenance of this poor woman tells just such a tale of work and privation, of endless toil and insufficient food, of haunting care that knows not what the morrow has in store, or whether the babe at her back will drain the bitter cup of famine to its deepest dregs.

9. The Queen of Sikkim.—I doubt whether she would be the gainer if she could exchange with this care-worn royal personage, the Queen of Sikkim, one of the Himalayan districts. With all her jewels, her massive head gear, her beringed hands, and her soft flowing robes, with all the royal dignity of her rank and position, there is the same pathetic droop of the mouth, the same wistfulness in her eyes, a look born of Oriental despotism and the down-trodden condition of all women in the East. One needs but to read Pundita Ramabais' work on the women in India, one needs but to know the history of her life to realize the apparent hopelessness of woman's struggle in Asiatic lands, and to realize yet more clearly how one woman's dauntless courage can overcome almost insurmountable obstacles.

10. A Thibetian Man.—Sikkim is populated largely by Thibetians, who have crossed the natural boundaries between the two countries and have found their Sikkim surroundings more to their taste. Attempts have been made to prove a connection between these Thibetians and the aboriginal Indians. But the bod-

ily development is essentially different. In the Thibetians, the skull is well developed. The forehead is low but broad. The bridge of the nose is very flat, and so much sunk that in profile it stands out very little, and sometimes does not show at all. The eyes are set obliquely. The hair is dark and bristly; the chest is broad, the muscles are strong and well-developed. The hands and feet are small, while to correspond, the stature is lower than that of the Europeans. They have one advantage over their Indian neighbors in that caste distinctions do not exist.

They are generally straightforward and possessed of quick understanding, though their fear of the priests verges on superstition. The usual dress of the men consists of a loose cloak, and long white trousers. Socks, lined with leather, serve as boots. The head is covered with a cap which our hero is wearing in a somewhat rakish fashion. The dress is generally shabby, partly on account of the difficulties of mountain traveling, and partly on account of the enormous taxes paid to the priests. But the Thibetian here shown is clad in holiday attire and the kerchief around his throat, and the broad cuffs at his wrists are of spotless white, which to my mind, only intensify the peculiar yellow countenance which characterizes the Mongolian race.

11. Largest Tea Plant at Darjeeling.—There is quite a change from our spruce-looking Thibetian to the laborer on the tea-plantation, who in his loose trousers, and white upper garment is anything but distinguished-looking. But it is to him and others of his class that we are indebted for the cup "that cheers

but not inebriates." The best tea is raised upon the hill-tops at about 7000 feet above sea level. It can be grown only under two conditions—those of moisture and heat. Hence, the southern slopes of the Himalayas are admirably adapted for its cultivation, for during the middle of the day the sun is warm, and at night the dews are copious. There is nothing surprising, therefore, in the huge proportions of this plant which is the largest in Darjeeling, and notwithstanding which, is worked entirely by the natives, only one or two Europeans being employed as overseers to superintend the work on the entire plantation. While the tea shrub usually grows to the height of five or six feet, this plant reaches to more than twice that height. The laborer, we here see, is picking the leaves which will afterward be carried to one of the houses, on the floor of which it will be placed to dry. After sorting and packing, it is ready for shipment, and the tea-drinking nations of the world will have cause to praise the largest tea plant of Darjeeling.

12. Kunchinjinga from Darjeeling.—The luxuriant plantations which abound in and around Darjeeling may delight the soul of the epicure. The man of practical realities may rejoice in the prosperous appearance of the country, and the sure gains that will accrue to the owners, but the man, whoever he may be, who possesses the artist's soul, will find a grander sight, a more blessed meaning in gazing at the snowy heights of Kunchinjinga. Before Nature's majesty our hearts speak, but our lips are dumb. Words seem weak and useless in the description of so sublime a scene. The everlasting hills and the

restless sea ever present new phases and yet are ever changeless and abiding. How small and trifling are men and their greatest works when compared with these giant wonders, ever fresh from the hand of God. Snow-covered, ice-crowned, they glitter like precious gems in the sunlight. As far as the eye can reach, we see a wall of mountains, the lower ranges forest-clad; the higher gray old peaks their heads have bared "as if the winds were saying prayer."

How can petty meanness and sordid care dwell side by side with Nature's most sublime creation? And yet the struggle for existence, the discordance of human voices, the hate in men's hearts dwell here in Darjeeling as in all parts of the world.

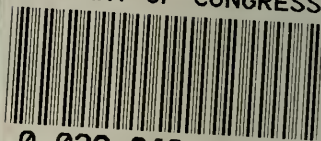
Our stay in Darjeeling is at an end, but we may carry with us most charming memories of our trip. Like children at a feast we left the best thing for the last, so that we may longer enjoy and remember the choicest bits. And with a last fond look at the snowy "roof of the world" we bid Darjeeling a sad farewell.

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